

July/August 2015

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Oil & Gas Exploration/Development: The BLM Ely District is seeking public review and comment on parcels of public land nominated for potential oil and gas exploration and development. The 30-day public comment period concludes **Friday, July 24, 2015**. *(See page 13 for more information)*

Sage Grouse Planning: The BLM and Forest Service on Thursday, May 28, released the Nevada and Northeastern California Sub-regional Greater Sage-Grouse Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement (PLUP/FEIS) that will help conserve greater sage-grouse habitat and support sustainable economic development on public lands. The plan is undergoing a 60-day Governor's Consistency Review period and concurrent 30-day protest period, after which a Record of Decision will be signed. *(See page 3 for more information)*

Bald Mountain Restoration Project: The BLM is beginning to design treatments for the Bald Mountain Treatment Unit of the Newark and Huntington Watershed Restoration Plan. *(See page 10 for more information)*

Overland Pass Habitat Improvement Project: Work in the project area is scheduled to begin in fall 2015. The project will benefit greater sage-grouse nesting, summer, and winter habitat; crucial summer, winter and transitional mule deer habitats; and pronghorn antelope habitat along the southern flanks of the Ruby Mountains in Elko and White Pine counties. *(See page 8 for more information)*

Ward Mountain Restoration Project: The Forest Service's 45-day objection period for the Draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for National Forest Service lands within the project area concluded Monday, June 1, 2015. The Forest Service received no objections. The BLM may issue a decision record in the future based on the actions analyzed in the Environmental Assessment. *(See page 7 for more information)*

Upcoming Town Hall Meetings: The public is invited to meet with BLM Ely District managers and staff to discuss [topics of citizens' interests](#).

- 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., **Tuesday, July 7**, BLM Ely District Office, 702 North Industrial Way, in Ely
- 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., **Thursday, July 16**, BLM Caliente Field Office, 1400 S. Front Street, in Caliente

ELY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The BLM Ely District has completed a scheduled five-year review of the Ely Resource Management Plan (RMP), per the direction of the BLM Nevada State Office. The

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upcoming sage grouse Record of Decision will amend the District's RMP; no other amendments are planned.

The RMP is expected to undergo review as a result of a November 2012 Idaho District Court decision on a Western Watershed Project (WWP) challenge of 18 RMPs across six western states. The court examined as "test cases" the Pinedale and Craters of the Moon RMPs prepared by the BLM Pinedale and Twin Falls districts, in Wyoming and Idaho, respectively. The court ruled that BLM must amend the two RMPs to address identified deficiencies. The court dismissed challenges to two other RMPs, leaving 14 RMPs in place pending the outcome of the "test cases." The Ely RMP is one of the 14 remaining RMPs.

Although the RMPs identify major factors in the loss of sagebrush habitat (including energy development and livestock use), WWP is questioning whether the challenged RMPs sufficiently address declining Greater Sage Grouse populations. WWP contends that the RMPs in question do not reference or follow guidance from the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the BLM National Sage Grouse Strategy, BLM Special Status Species Policy and conservation assessments. The suit also contends that BLM did not consider/analyze alternatives calling for reduced or no livestock grazing, despite the fact that grazing was found to be a "major contributing factor" to the decline of sage grouse habitat.

WWP has also filed a motion to consolidate their appeal of the Ely RMP and their appeal of the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Environmental Assessment in District Court in Idaho (*see Watershed Analysis*).

WATERSHED ANALYSIS

The Western Watershed Project (WWP) in December 2012 appealed the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Environmental Assessment's Decision Record for vegetation projects and Final Decision for range projects. In June 2013, WWP withdrew their appeals regarding the watershed restoration plan and instead filed a complaint with the District Court in Idaho, asking that it be consolidated with their case against the Ely District Resource Management Plan. On March 13, 2014, the District Court in Idaho denied WWP's Motion to Consolidate, and transferred the case to the District Court in Nevada. A decision is expected from the Federal District Court by early summer 2015 regarding WWP's motion.

The Ely District is preparing a watershed restoration plan for the South Spring Valley and Hamblin Valley watersheds. A preliminary environmental assessment (EA) is expected to be released for public comment in 2015.

The BLM issued the Newark and Huntington Watershed Restoration Plan Finding of No Significant Impact; Decision Record for vegetation treatments; and Final Decision for range improvements in January 2015. WWP has appealed the decision to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) and Office of Hearings and Appeals. IBLA affirmed

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BLM's decision for the vegetation treatment portion of the project. The petition for stay on the range improvement decision was granted.

The BLM expects in 2015 to release for public review the proposed watershed restoration plans for Toquop Wash and Tule Desert, and Beaver Dam Wash.

Watershed analysis has been completed on the Cave Valley, Lake Valley, Antelope Valley, North Antelope, Gleason Creek, North Spring Valley, Smith Valley, Steptoe A, South Steptoe, Dry Lake Valley, Panaca Valley, Kane Springs Wash, Clover Creek North and South, Newark Valley, Huntington Valley, and White River South watersheds.

Watershed characterization has been completed for the Long Valley/Ruby Valley watershed implementation plan and analysis has begun. It is anticipated to be complete in FY16.

The BLM Ely District, in collaboration with the USDA Agriculture Research Station and National Resource Conservation Service, has developed Ecological Site State and Transition Models for Major Land Resource Areas 28A and 28B, which will benefit watershed planning and grazing strategies, and vegetation treatments. The models were presented at the 2015 National Society of Range Management Conference in Sacramento. The final models are now available for use. The project was funded by the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

SAGE GROUSE PLANNING

The BLM and Forest Service on Thursday, May 28, 2015, released the Nevada and Northeastern California Sub-regional Greater Sage-Grouse Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement (PLUP/FEIS) that will help conserve greater sage-grouse habitat and support sustainable economic development on public lands. The plan is now undergoing a 60-day Governor's Consistency Review period and concurrent 30-day protest period, after which a Record of Decision will be signed.

The collaborative federal-state effort includes three key elements to conserve the sagebrush landscape, which faces threats from fire, invasive species and encroaching development: a comprehensive strategy to fight rangeland fire, strong conservation plans for federal public lands, and conservation actions on state and private lands.

The plan addresses issues identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in a 2010 determination that found the greater sage-grouse was deserving of protection under the Endangered Species Act due to the inadequacy of regulatory protections to prevent further sagebrush habitat fragmentation, placing the bird in danger of extinction. Federal protection was deferred because of higher priorities; however, the Service is required to revisit the determination by September 30, 2015.

The plan provides a layered management approach that offers the highest level of protection in the most valuable habitat, known as Priority Habitat Management Areas.

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Within priority habitat, the plan seeks to limit or eliminate new surface disturbance, particularly in Sagebrush Focal Areas, identified by the Service as “stronghold” areas essential for the species’ survival. The proposed plan seeks to minimize disturbance in General Habitat Management Areas, which are lands that require some special management to sustain greater sage-grouse populations, but are not considered as important as priority habitat.

The plan will honor all valid, existing rights, including those for oil and gas development, renewable energy, rights-of-way, locatable minerals, and other permitted projects. The plan measures only apply to BLM and Forest Service-managed lands and minerals. To learn more, go to www.blm/sagegrouse.

ENERGY

Natural Gas-fired Energy Development -

Toquop Energy Project: The BLM has issued a Notice to Proceed to Toquop Energy, Inc., for a natural gas-fired power plant. Construction can start once the proponent satisfies conditions outlined in the Notice. Toquop Energy, Inc. is simultaneously pursuing purchasing lands necessary to construct the plant and ancillary facilities. The Ely Resource Management Plan provides for the disposal of up to 640 acres for power plant development. The BLM will dispose of no more than 200 acres because of a conflict with the Western Wide Energy Corridor.

Wind Energy Development -

Spring Valley Wind Energy Facility: A second Golden Eagle fatality in as many months has been reported at the Spring Valley Wind Energy Facility. The fatality occurred on March 25, 2015. The first fatality was documented on February 9. A total of three eagles have been killed at the facility in the past three years.

The annual mortality threshold for Golden Eagles at the facility is one, in accordance with the Avian and Bat Protection Plan. It is now up to the Technical Advisory Committee, comprised of biologists representing the BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and Nevada Department of Wildlife; to determine what mitigation measures, if any, should be recommended for implementation. The BLM will approve any measures deemed appropriate.

Meantime, Pattern Energy, owner and operator of the facility, is preparing a report on the latest incident in accordance with their FWS Special Purpose Permit. The remains of the bird have been transferred to the FWS.

Spring Valley Wind has been in operation since late-summer 2012. After 533 bats were recorded killed by the wind turbines in 2013, triple the amount allowed by federal regulators, mitigation measures were initiated enacting a new “cut-in” speeds for the turbines, increasing the wind speed required to spin the turbine from 7 mph to 11 mph. In 2014 the bat mortality rates were reduced by more than 75-percent as compared

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to the same time frame last year. Mortality surveys completed so far this year recorded only 23 bat fatalities. Last year at this time there were 103 bat fatalities recorded.

Solar Energy Development -

Dry Lake Valley North Solar Energy Zone: The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is developing a Regional Mitigation Strategy to compensate for unavoidable impacts associated with the development of the 25,069-acre Dry Lake Valley North Solar Energy Zone (SEZ) in Lincoln County, Nev.

The Dry Lake Valley North SEZ, located in north Dry Lake Valley about 45 miles northeast of Alamo, is one of five solar energy zones in Nevada. In all, there are 17 SEZ in six western states, Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah. If fully built, projects within the designated zones could produce as much as 23,700 megawatts of solar energy, sufficient to serve approximately 7 million homes.

While the BLM requires developers to take all reasonable measures to avoid and/or minimize impacts on the project site, there are often unavoidable impacts associated with developing land for solar power generation, and the loss of the resource values is often long-term. Accordingly, the BLM solar energy program requires consideration of compensatory mitigation, which involves the protection and/or restoration of resource values off the project site, but in the same region. The Regional Mitigation Strategy for the Dry Lake Valley North SEZ will identify the unavoidable impacts associated with developing this SEZ, describe those unavoidable impacts that warrant compensatory mitigation, present proposed mitigation actions (such as restoring native vegetation in disturbed areas) and where those actions could occur, and recommend a per acre fee to be paid by developers to fund the compensatory mitigation actions. The Dry Lake Valley North SEZ Regional Mitigation Strategy is expected to be completed in 2015. The public will have to opportunity to review and comment on the draft Strategy.

Interim products and information on the project can be obtained from the BLM Caliente Field Office, 1400 South Front Street, Caliente; BLM Ely District Office, 702 North Industrial Way, Ely; and online at http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/ely_field_office/blm_programs/energy/dry_lake_valley_north/project_documents.html

Hydro Energy -

White Pine Pumped Storage Project: Gridflex Energy, LLC, in September 2013 submitted a preliminary permit application for the White Pine Pumped Storage Project facility. Gridflex and White Pine Water Power, LLC, are proposing through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to construct a stored water pumping facility north of Ely, Nev. The proposed White Pine Pumped Storage Project would utilize three generators with a combined capacity 300 MW to generate 919,800 megawatt-hours, annually.

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A permit is issued only to allow the permit holder to investigate the feasibility of the project while the permittee conducts investigations and secures necessary data to determine the feasibility of the proposed project and to prepare a license application. FERC has given the initial approvals to begin working with the BLM to develop a plan of development, begin the NEPA process, and develop natural resource and economic data. FERC will lead the project.

Electrical Transmission Development -

ON Line Project: Reclamation is in the final phases and development of a plan for wildlife and restoration monitoring is underway. The high-voltage line that connects NV Energy's northern and southern electrical grids and provides for the transmission of renewable energy was formally dedicated in January 2014.

TransWest Express Project: The Final Environmental Impact Statement on the TransWest Express Transmission Project has been released. The Record of Decision for the project is expected to be released this fall. The 730-mile transmission line project would extend from Wyoming, through Colorado and Utah, to southern Nevada through the southeast corner of Lincoln County. It would deliver up to 3,000 megawatts of electric power to major load centers, including Las Vegas and San Diego, Calif., by tapping in to wind energy resources in southern Wyoming. The BLM Wyoming State Office is the lead office for the project.

The Zephyr Project: The BLM is scheduling public meetings and selecting a contractor to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Electric Transmission Line Project that would originate in the Wheatland/Chugwater area of Wyoming and extend 950-plus miles to Eldorado Valley, south of Las Vegas. BLM Wyoming received the application and Plan of Development in March 2012.

FIRE

Fire Management –

Current Fire Conditions: Abnormally dry conditions remain, statewide. BLM Ely District Fire Management asks the public to recreate safely. Learn more at <http://on.doi.gov/1wYFiht>

Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation –

Cottonwood Fire: Fire crews have since mid-February been working on a contour felling project that will further mitigate erosion and promote vegetative recovery. The Ely District in December 2014 aeri ally-seeded a mixture of grasses, forbs and shrubs over approximately 1,210 acres of the July 2014, lightning-ignited Cottonwood Fire, located about 15 miles southeast of Pioche, Nev., to mitigate erosion, promote vegetative recovery and stem expansion of invasive plants and noxious weeds.

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Lages Fire: The BLM Ely District in February finished drill seeding at the site of the Lages Fire that last July burned more than 9,000 acres of primarily public lands, about 60 miles north of Ely, Nev. Approximately 978 acres of the 5,000 acres that were aerially seeded in December 2014, but inaccessible to drill seeders due to terrain, vegetation and more, received a one-way chaining. The chaining will help to mitigate erosion, promote natural vegetative recovery and increase the success of the aerial seeding. The burn area was seeded with a mixture of sagebrush, and grasses, shrubs and forbs. Temporary fencing was installed around the burn area to help prevent access by livestock and wild horses until re-vegetation criteria are met.

Sampson Fire: The BLM Ely District this spring conducted a one-way chaining on 882 acres burned in the 2014 Sampson Fire, about 65 miles north of Ely, Nev. The chaining follows an approximately 320-acre aerial seeding conducted in December 2014. The BLM seeded with a mixture of predominantly sagebrush, and grasses, forbs and shrubs to promote vegetative recovery, stem expansion of invasive plants and noxious weeds, and preserve the wilderness-like characteristics of the public lands neighboring the Becky Peak Wilderness. Temporary fencing was installed around the burn area to help prevent access by livestock and wild horses until re-vegetation criteria are met.

Black Fire: In coordination with Great Basin National Park, the BLM Ely District in December 2014 aerially-seeded a mixture of grasses, forbs and shrubs over approximately 360 acres of National Park Service and BLM-administered lands that burned in the approximately 5,000-acre Black Fire that was ignited by lightning in 2013. The seeding will help to maintain the pristine nature of the Park and surrounding public lands by mitigating erosion, promoting vegetative recovery and stemming the spread of invasive plants and noxious weeds.

North Creek Fire: The BLM Ely District in December 2014 completed a one-way chaining at the site of the July 2013 fire in north Spring Valley, about 70 miles northeast of Ely, Nev. The chaining increases the efficacy of an October 2014 aerial seeding conducted in coordination with the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW). The BLM and NDOW seeded a mixture of grasses, forbs and shrubs over 978 acres of the approximately 1,019-acre fire. NDOW paid for the helicopter. The BLM provided the seed, labor and project administration.

Fuels Reduction and Restoration –

Ward Mountain Restoration Project: The BLM Ely District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Ely Ranger District and Ely Shoshone Tribe have prepared a Final Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Ward Mountain project. The federal agencies and Tribe are proposing to use mechanical and chemical treatments, and prescribed fire to restore health to vegetative communities to improve wildlife habitat and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

The proposed project area is 100,000 acres, or about 53,731 acres of BLM-administered lands, 39,264 acres of Forest Service lands, and 2,507 acres of Tribal lands. Of that, the Forest Service would treat about 14,381 acres. The BLM and Tribe have not yet

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determined how many acres of the public and Tribal lands would be treated. The remaining acreage is state lands or private property, which would require that an agreement be signed prior to potential treatments.

The Forest Service has prepared a Draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for National Forest Service lands within the project area. The Forest Service's 45 day objection period ended June 1, 2015. No objections to the Draft Decision were received. The BLM may issue a decision record in the future based on the actions analyzed in the EA.

Overland Pass Habitat Improvement Project: The BLM on April 9, 2015 issued a Final Environmental Assessment and Decision Record for the Overland Pass Habitat Improvement Project. The project will be located in greater sage-grouse nesting, summer, and winter habitat; crucial summer, winter and transitional mule deer habitats; and pronghorn antelope habitat along the southern flanks of the Ruby Mountains in Elko and White Pine counties. The project area will encompass approximately 45,200 acres, of which approximately 18,500 acres would undergo manual, mechanical and prescribed fire treatments over a 10 year period. The project is a collaborative effort by the BLM, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and Nevada Department of Wildlife. Work will begin in the project area in the fall of 2015.

Kern Mountain Landscape Restoration Project: Weather permitting, the BLM expects in 2015-2016 to burn slash piles remaining from tree thinning treatments conducted in the spring and fall of 2014. Tree thinning and/or mastication could begin within the project area in fall 2015, depending on funding availability. The project improves watershed health and native habitat, which benefits area wildlife such as elk, mule deer and sage grouse. The project also reduces the risk of a catastrophic wildfire. The project is being implemented in accordance with the BLM Ely District Resource Management Plan and the Kern Mountain Landscape Restoration Project Environmental Assessment.

Egan and Johnson Basins Restoration Project: The BLM is preparing a preliminary environmental assessment for public review. A release date has not been established. The proposed fuels reduction and habitat improvement project would be located in the Egan and Johnson basins, about 5 miles west of Cherry Creek, Nev. The project would provide for vegetative diversity and improve wildlife (sage-grouse) habitat, as well as reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, by selectively thinning pinion- juniper. Up to 50-percent of the approximately 14,000-acre project area would be treated using manual and mechanical treatment methods, and prescribed fire. The project is consistent with the BLM Ely District Resource Management Plan.

Duck Creek Basin Fuels Reduction and Habitat Improvement Project: The BLM is preparing a preliminary environmental assessment for public review. A release date has not been established. The proposed fuels reduction and habitat improvement project would be located in Duck Creek Basin, about 15 miles northeast of Ely, Nev. The project would provide for vegetative diversity and improve habitat for wildlife, such as greater sage-grouse, mule deer, and elk, as well as reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire by selectively thinning pinion-pine and juniper, and treating sagebrush communities. Up to

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13,000 acres of the approximately 29,000-acre project area would be treated using manual and mechanical treatment methods, and prescribed fire. The project is consistent with the BLM Ely District Resource Management Plan.

Aspen and Sagebrush Steppe Joint Restoration Project with Great Basin National Park: Implementation of the collaborative project between the BLM and Great Basin National Park began in November 2013. When completed, the project will have restored about 1,000 acres of Aspen and sagebrush communities in and around Box Canyon and Kiou Basin, in White Pine County, Nev. It will have combined prescribed fire use, scheduled in fall 2015, with mechanical treatments that were completed in spring 2014. Project funding comes from Round 11 of the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

Combs Creek: The BLM has begun mastication on 750 acres of the Combs Creek project area, located in south Butte Valley about 20 miles northwest of Ely, Nev. Great Basin Institute/Nevada Conservation Corps will also be hand thinning trees using chainsaws throughout the project area during the 2015 summer. In all, the BLM plans to treat 4,500 to 7,000 acres of the 23,000-acre project area to reduce fuel loading and improve Greater sage-grouse habitat by selectively thinning pinion-juniper from sagebrush communities. Implementation began in late July 2014 with funding provided by the Nevada Department of Wildlife's heritage fund program through the White Pine County Wildlife Advisory Board.

Pioche and Caselton Wildland Urban Interface Project: All major project components have been completed. Remaining slash piles will be burned in fall 2015, as weather conditions allow. The 11,300-acre project designed to improve habitat and protect area residents from catastrophic wildfire was funded by the fuels program and Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

Patterson Pass Sage Grouse Habitat Improvement Project: The BLM in summer 2015 will resume hand-thinning pinion-juniper on approximately 1,100 acres of the project area. The BLM in January 2015 chained 1,000 acres of the project area. Approximately 3,500 acres of the nearly 4,800-acre project was already completed by the end of December 2014. The project is the first implementation of the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Plan. Funding is provided by the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, Healthy Lands Initiative, Lincoln County Game Board and the Mule Deer Foundation.

Jakes Valley Sagebrush Restoration Project: Temporarily on hold, the project is designed to improve or restore sagebrush communities, livestock and wildlife habitat, and watershed health while reducing fuel loading by restoring Wyoming sagebrush sites in and around Jakes Wash, 20 miles west of Ely, Nev. The project calls for mowing up to 2,000 acres of the total project area, and thinning pinion and juniper across the total project area, creating a mosaic that provides for wildlife edge areas. The BLM would seed about 60-percent of the treated area with a mix of perennial grasses and forbs.

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Stonehouse Prescribed Burn: The BLM has burned approximately 30 acres of slash piles remaining from a pinion-juniper tree-thinning project near Lages Junction and Schellbourne Pass in the Schell Creek Range, about 70 miles north of Ely. The remaining piles will be burned in winter 2015-2016. The Stonehouse Prescribed Burn reduced hazardous fuels accumulations to protect the watershed from potentially large, lethal wildfires; treated fuels to improve health and restore ecological stability, reduced or halted the encroachment of pinion-pine and Utah juniper trees to restore and promote wildlife habitat resiliency, and recycled nutrients and enhanced species diversity of fire-adapted and fire-dependent vegetation.

Shingle Creek Aspen Restoration Project: Weather permitting, the BLM is scheduled to burn white fir slash piles in winter 2015-2016. The aspen restoration project is located on the west slope of the Snake Range near Great Basin National Park, about 40 miles southeast of Ely, Nev. Removing the conifers will promote aspen regeneration and health.

North Antelope Habitat Restoration: The BLM in January 2015 finished mastication on approximately 1,000 acres of pinion-pine and juniper. Hand thinning is scheduled to continue in summer 2015 by utilizing Nevada Conservation Corps crews. The 12,000-acre habitat improvement project located on the north end of the Antelope Range, about 70 miles northeast of Ely, Nev., is approximately 85-percent complete.

Cold Springs Project: A contractor is thinning pinion-juniper through a service contract allowing him to purchase the product for resale. Weather permitting, the BLM is scheduled in winter of 2015-2016 to burn slash piles remaining from previous thinning efforts. The project goal is to provide a hazardous fuel break and demonstration area depicting various pinion-juniper thinning densities.

South Steptoe Valley Watershed Restoration Project: The BLM and Nevada Department of Wildlife have completed a 5,000-acre pinion-juniper chaining within the project area, located in south Steptoe Valley. Hand thinning will continue this spring on an additional 2,870 acres through two contracts. The BLM expects in fall 2015 to chain an additional 2,000 acres of the project area and possibly implement prescribed fire treatments.

Lake Valley Restoration Project: The BLM and Nevada Department of Wildlife plan to begin hand thinning over approximately 5,200 acres of pinion-juniper in the Lake Valley Watershed during the summer of 2015. The project will implement the Lake Valley portion of the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Plan. The thinning will benefit sage-grouse by removing trees within potential habitat.

Bald Mountain Restoration Project: The BLM is beginning to design treatments for the Bald Mountain Treatment Unit of the Newark and Huntington Watershed Restoration Plan. The BLM plans to implement the SNPLMA funded project during the fall of 2015 and 2016. The project will treat approximately 1,600 acres to benefit mule deer and sage-grouse, and will treat approximately 25 acres of aspen restoration. The Nevada Department of Wildlife is a cooperator on the project, and is assisting with treatment design.

LANDS & REALTY

Lincoln and White Pine County Land Disposals identified in the Lincoln and White Pine County Conservation, Recreation and Development Acts, and Ely Resource Management Plan:

- The BLM Ely District, Egan and Schell field offices held a public auction on April 1, selling two parcels of agency-administered public land totaling 78.02 acres, raising \$216,580.

The Egan Field Office sold through a competitive sale one 38.02-acre parcel of public land located about one-quarter mile northwest of Ely to Thomas Bath, of White Pine County, Nev., for \$135,000. Bath was the lone bidder. The Schell Field Office sold one 40-acre parcel of public land located near South Industrial Way, about two miles north of Ely. The field office sold the parcel through a modified competitive sale to Terry and Randy Reck, of White Pine County, Nev., for \$81,580. The parcel contains a batch plant and defunct gravel pit previously operated by the Reck brothers who were identified as the designated bidders and authorized to meet the high bid. They were the lone bidders. A second 40-acre parcel for competitive sale was unsold. The parcel may be available at a later date.

The sales were conducted in accordance with the White Pine County Conservation, Recreation, and Development Act of 2006, complied with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, and were in conformance with the 2008 Ely Resource Management Plan. The Nevada State General Education Fund will receive five percent of the sales proceeds and White Pine County will receive 10 percent. The BLM will receive 85-percent for archaeological resources, natural resource protection, recreation and wilderness planning, and other opportunities in White Pine County.

- Lincoln County Land Disposals: The Ely District, Caliente Field Office is processing three land sales: Windmill Sale, Cowboy Sale and Hiko Sale. Lincoln County Round 3 is also being processed for four areas: Alamo, Caliente, Panaca and Pioche.

MINERALS

Active Mining Plans –

Bald Mountain Mine: The BLM is finalizing analysis for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for a Barrick Gold US, Inc., proposal to expand the Bald Mountain Mine located in White Pine County, about 70 miles northwest of Ely and 30 miles northeast of Eureka, Nev. The DEIS is expected to be released for public review in 2015. The 45-day comment period will include public meetings. The proposal calls for the expansion of existing mine facilities in the North Operations Area Project, expansion

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of the existing Casino/Winrock Plan of Operations and incorporating it into the North Operations Area Project, and establishment of a South Operations Area Project that would encompass and expand the existing Yankee and Alligator Ridge mine sites. Expanding the North Operations Area Project and incorporating the Casino/Winrock Plan of Operations into the North Operations Area Project would increase the total surface disturbance from 9,124 acres to 13,704 acres and add four new heap leach pads. Establishing the South Operations Area Project would increase the total surface disturbance from 960 acres to 3,643 acres. The South Operation Area Project Plan of Operations would include an electrical transmission line and an access road between the North and South operations areas.

Gold Rock Mine Project: The BLM is reviewing comments received during the 45-day public review period on the Gold Rock Mine Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and preparing the Final EIS, which is expected to be made available to the public in 2015.

The proposed Gold Rock Mine Project would be constructed and operated in the same geographic area as the reclaimed and closed Easy Junior Mine. The project area consists of a total of 18,745 acres of BLM public lands with the majority of the mine facilities located within a fenced mine area totaling 8,757 acres. A total of 3,946 acres of disturbance would be authorized. The majority of this area would be reclaimed, while a small portion would not. The draft EIS analyzes Midway's proposed action, six action alternatives, and the No Action Alternative. The action alternatives were developed to help reduce project-related impacts to greater sage-grouse and mule deer.

The projected mining period is 10 years, with associated construction, closure, reclamation and post-closure monitoring periods extending the project life to approximately 48 years. Midway Gold US Inc. estimates that the project would create between 150-250 jobs.

The Draft EIS describes seven action alternatives and is available on-line at <http://on.doi.gov/1zAxyW9>.

Notices and Exploration –

DHI Minerals LTD on Jan. 6, 2015, submitted a Notice of Intent for the Green Springs Exploration Project for two exploration drill holes on 1.12 acres in Railroad Valley near the closed Green Springs Mine. The Egan Field Office is reviewing the notice for completeness.

The Meadow Bay Gold Corporation Plan of Operation for Exploration was approved on March 19, 2014. The Environmental Assessment (EA) was finalized and the Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impact were also signed. Meadow Bay plans to drill 69 exploratory holes in and around the Atlanta Mine site, located approximately 33 miles northeast of Pioche, Nev.

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The BLM completed its review of comments received on the preliminary environmental assessment (EA), which analyzed impacts of Aurion Gold's intended exploration for gold at Logan Pass in the Mt. Irish Area of Critical Environmental Concern, located about five miles west of Hiko, Nev. The comment period concluded in March 2014. A decision has been signed and authorization is expected shortly.

The BLM has reviewed comments received on the preliminary environmental assessment (EA) for the Gold Springs Exploration Project, located about 21 miles east of Pioche, Nev. The public comment period concluded in February 2014. Gold Springs, LLC, a subsidiary of High Desert Gold in May 2013 submitted a Plan of Operations. The plan proposes to disturb up to 100 acres. Gold Springs is currently conducting disturbance on two sites of 4.9 and 2.7 acres, respectively.

Mineral Materials –

The Ely District sells mineral materials from 14 Community pits and through exclusive sale permits.

Oil & Gas Exploration/Development –

Oil & Gas Exploration/Development: The BLM Ely District is seeking public review and comment on parcels of public land nominated for potential oil and gas exploration and development. The 30-day public comment period concludes **Friday, July 24, 2015**.

The BLM received requests to lease 94 nominated parcels of public land, totaling 140,389 acres. The parcels have been analyzed for potential impacts in the preliminary environmental assessment (EA), in accordance with the Oil & Gas Leasing Reform mandated in 2010. Lease stipulations identified in the Ely Resource Management Plan (2008) are attached to some parcels to help protect certain resources. The preliminary EA is available for public review at: <http://on.doi.gov/1zIOyhA>.

Interested individuals should address all written comments to the BLM Caliente Field Office, PO Box 237, Caliente, NV 89008, Attn: Dec. 2015 O&G Lease Sale or fax them to the Caliente Office at (775) 726-8111. Comments may also be submitted electronically at <http://1.usa.gov/1SEz5UW>. Comments can also be emailed with the subject, "ATTN: 2015 Oil & Gas Lease Sale" to blm_nv_eydo_2015ogls@blm.gov.

A Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale is scheduled on December 8, 2015. Additional information about the sale including the sale notice and parcel list will be posted to <http://on.doi.gov/15sFoY0> as it becomes available.

The Ely District is processing three Applications for Permit to Drill (APD). Makoil Oil submitted an APD to drill in Coal Valley on July 31, 2014. The Caliente Field Office is currently completing an EA. Bestoso Oil & Gas has submitted an APD in White River Valley for the BOG #1 well. A Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) is in progress.

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Envy Energy submitted an APD for Black Point East #1 well in Railroad Valley and the EA is currently underway.

[Makoil's Portuguese Well in Railroad Valley near Portuguese Mountain remains active since 2014. Drilling operations have so far been exploratory in nature.](#)

NOXIOUS/INVASIVE WEED MANAGEMENT

The BLM Ely District is implementing the 2010 Integrated Weed Management Plan that provides for the inventory, treatment, and monitoring of non-native and noxious invasive weeds. The plan includes weed prevention procedures and treatment options, including herbicides, for use in and outside of Wilderness; as well as outreach and education measures. (Use of herbicides in threatened and endangered species habitat requires consultation.) The BLM works with private landowners, non-profit organizations and local, state and federal agencies through 10 Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs).

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

District staff continues to monitor and assess rangeland conditions associated with forage and water availability and coordinate with permittees regarding grazing management actions associated with drought conditions.

The BLM Nevada State Office and district/field offices in spring 2015 sent drought information letters to grazing permittees, informing them of the abnormally dry conditions, in addition to providing an opportunity to plan for changes in the 2015 grazing season, if necessary.

Staff continues to fully process and renew term grazing permits (TPR), plan range improvement projects (riparian and spring developments, fences, and more), and process grazing applications and transfers. Links to documents are located on the BLM website at: https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do

RECREATION & TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING

[Lincoln County Partners Multi-Purpose Non-Motorized Trail System](#): The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is partnering with the City of Caliente, Lincoln County, Nevada Division of State Parks and International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) to design environmentally-sustainable, multipurpose non-motorized trails systems to connect the public lands with existing and planned-for trails systems within Caliente and nearby Kershaw-Ryan State Park.

Planning and design is being funded by \$90,000 in partner contributions. The BLM and City of Caliente have requested funding for implementation through Round 15 of the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA).

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The BLM is seeking \$2 million to construct up to 25 miles of trails systems and a trailhead with restrooms and shade structures. The City of Caliente is requesting funding to build five miles of trails to compliment the already existing Meadow Valley Wash Linear Park, a two-plus mile walkway through Caliente that was also funded through SNPLMA.

Ash Springs Recreation Site: The Ash Springs Recreation Site, located alongside U.S. Highway 93 in Lincoln County, remains closed. The two-year closure notice was published in the *Federal Register* on Friday, June 6, 2014. The closure is necessary because extensive modification of the man-made pool by public users has made it unsafe and is degrading endangered species habitat. The BLM is considering management possibilities for the site, whether repairs to the pool are feasible, and if traditional uses are impairing habitat for the Federally-listed endangered White River springfish and three listed BLM Nevada Sensitive Species. The BLM is working with the local community on plan development. Substantial repairs to the site would require additional funding, planning and coordination, which the BLM would analyze in an environmental assessment.

Travel Management Planning: The BLM Ely District, Egan Field Office is preparing a plan for approximately 1,428,000 acres within the Huntington, Jakes, Long, Newark and Ruby valleys, in White Pine County. The BLM will release the draft plan for public comment.

Great Basin Teachers Workshop: The Great Basin Teachers Workshop is scheduled in July 2015 at Cathedral Gorge State Park, in Lincoln County, Nevada.

WILD HORSES

Water Canyon Wild Horse Growth Suppression Pilot Program Preliminary EA: The 30-day public comment period concluded Monday, June 15. The BLM Ely District, Schell Field Office is preparing the final environmental assessment (EA).

The EA analyzes a proposal to conduct a pilot project to gather, and treat and release, as well as remove excess wild horses from inside the Water Canyon area, located within the Antelope Herd Management Area (HMA), about 60 miles north of Ely, Nev.

The project goal is to stabilize and maintain a wild horse population of 25-30 animals within the Water Canyon portion of the Antelope HMA. The current estimated population is 66 wild horses. Under the proposal, the BLM would gather the horses through bait and water trapping or by helicopter, and treat and release 25-30 animals back into the project area. Mares selected for release would be treated with PZP-22, a time-release fertility control vaccine with an expected efficacy of about two years. The mares would be re-treated every 20-24 months and monitored to determine treatment effectiveness. Excess wild horses to be removed would be offered to the public through a trap site adoption.

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The Water Canyon Wild Horse Growth Suppression Pilot Program Preliminary Environmental Assessment is available for public review at <http://on.doi.gov/1PKK0Jg>. Printed copies are available at the BLM Ely District Office, 702 North Industrial Way, in Ely.

The BLM Ely District continues to monitor wild horse conditions, districtwide, in particular in the Silver King Herd Management Area (HMA) and north end of Butte Valley where forage availability is a concern. Census flights have been conducted in the Antelope, Eagle and Silver King HMAs, as well as the Moriah herd Area.

WILDERNESS

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics: The BLM is performing project by project inventory updates for Lands with Wilderness Character.

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Ely Ranger District Wilderness Management Plan: The final decision was signed in February 2015. The plan provides supplemental management direction for the preservation of wilderness character in the Ely Ranger District's nine wilderness areas and Bureau of Land Management-administered portion of the Mt. Moriah Wilderness.

SPECIAL LEGISLATION

Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA): The Round 15 nomination period closed Friday, Nov. 7, 2014. The Ely District submitted seven projects; three under the Eastern Nevada Landscape Restoration Project addressing sage-grouse habitat, and state and transition models; three in the Conservation Initiatives category addressing cave management planning, and desert tortoise and Pahrump poolfish habitat; and one in Capital Improvement that would provide for trails in the Caliente area (*see Lincoln County Partners Multi-Purpose Non-Motorized Trail System, page 14*).

The Sub-group committees met in February to formulate a recommendation for funding to the Partners Working Group. The Partners Working Group met in April to review their recommendation and formulate a recommendation for the Executive Committee. Public comments on the recommendation will be accepted through July 30, 2015. The Executive Committee will meet in September to review the recommendation.

Lincoln County Archaeological Initiative (LCAI): A request for proposals for Round 8 was published Jan. 13, 2015. Proposals were due by March 13. The Archaeological Resources Team (ART) met in April to review the proposals and provided a recommendation for funding to the Partners Working Group, which will meet in May.

Funding for LCAI comes from revenues generated through the sale of public lands identified for disposal in the Lincoln County Lands Act and existing land-use plans. The Act created a special account in which 85-percent of the revenues from land sales are deposited. Funds in the special account may be used for a number of activities, including

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the study of archaeological resources in Lincoln County. The remaining funds are distributed to the State of Nevada (5-percent) and Lincoln County (10-percent).

To date the BLM has approved \$7,190,523 for archaeological projects in Lincoln County. Expenditures approved include documenting Paiute and Shoshone rock art sites, and oral histories and practices; archaeological site inventories; obsidian tool stone research; settlement pattern studies; educational brochures and websites; and upgrade of archaeological collections by inventorying, re-marking and repackaging of artifacts collected from public lands in Lincoln County.

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Contact Chris Hanefeld, BLM Ely District public affairs specialist, at (775) 289-1842 or chanefel@blm.gov for more information on these and other projects/programs in the BLM Ely District.